



Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education

P.O. Box 110505
Juneau, Alaska 99811-0505

Customer Service Center
Toll Free: (800) 441-2962
In Juneau: (907) 465-2962
TDD: (907) 465-3143
Fax: (907) 465-5316
acpe.alaska.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: Members, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education
FROM: Diane Barrans, Executive Director
DATE: December 29, 2014
SUBJECT: Executive Director's Report

Throughout this year your managers and staff continue to be so engaged in various initiatives that the regular, day-to-day work of serving our fellow Alaskans through early awareness outreach and administering scholarship, grant and loan aid can, at times, almost become obscured. However, the common, binding theme running through all activity has been solid connections to our mission of supporting Alaskans' access to and success in education and training beyond high school.

ACPE's 2014 agenda was notable for highly ambitious, some might even say audacious, goals:

- Improving Programs' Strength and Structure—Staff developed and supported two legislative proposals to improve the quality, availability, and effectiveness of the state's student financial aid programs. While only one of the bills was completely successful, both were met with keen interest and broad support within the legislature, underscoring the importance of the work we do. SB195, which has become law, has provided the Commission with authority to ensure students using these programs are being incented and rewarded for behaviors which result in success. I fully expect to see the alternative legislation to enable the Alaska Student Loan Corporation to issue education loan funding bonds backed by the State's full faith and credit to be introduced again in 2015.
- Increasing Efficiency/Capacity—The first major servicing system upgrade since HELMS (Higher Education Loan Management System) implementation in 1995, this project will transition loan servicing from the State of Alaska Mainframe to a server-based structure. Slated for completion March 31, 2015, this move to a .net environment will provide long-term benefit by reducing HELMS's annual operational costs.
- Leveraging Postsecondary Education Success Advocacy Statewide—We are cultivating partnerships inclusive of education, community-based, and state agency organizations which share our commitment to student success and to growing Alaska's highly skilled and educated resident population. The Alaska Postsecondary Access and Completion Network (the Network) is a unique initiative for ACPE in that we intend for its long-term existence to continue to involve, but be independent from, the Commission. At your first meeting of 2015, you will hear three related presentations to facilitate your understanding of the Network's development to

date and plans for 2015. This will be an opportunity for dialogue with two of the thirteen executive committee members guiding the Network's development.

- Building Capacity for Informed Policy and Practice—This year, the ANSWERS project accelerated into its third and final development phase and is slated for implementation in mid-2015. Still only a concept in the minds of interested members of the public, there is a growing interest in the potential of longitudinal linking of data for use in assessing and improving our education and training system. When ANSWERS does go live in July 2015, it will be imperative to immediately demonstrate its value to the state to build a constituency for the resource.
- Finding Life after Federal Funding for ACAC Service Delivery—Over the past six years, Commission managers have carried out an extended pilot project in the form of the Alaska College and Career Advising Corps (ACAC). In each of those years we identified what was or was not working and, as needed, modified program structure, content, delivery, etc. to ensure the highest possible positive ACAC impact. School customers have expressed great support for the program and the outcomes data confirm ACAC services appear to make a positive impact on the target population. With the federal funding stream about to run dry, ACPE, working with interested stakeholders, has actively been working throughout the past year on identifying sustainability models. Because of these efforts Commission staff were ready when solicited to participate in what may represent a successor model and be an opportunity for continued refinement and assessment of this program. Under the Science, Technology, Engineering and Math of Voyage to Excellence (STEM to VTE) program, ACAC is providing college and career guidance to students in four Alaska districts.

While certainly not an exhaustive catalog of Commission work over the last year, the preceding initiatives accurately reflect the organization's forward-looking culture and values.

Looking ahead to 2015, there is no doubt it will be a challenging and exciting year. Given that the Walker Administration's tenure can only be counted in weeks as of the date of this report, we have yet to learn what their specific policies and direction will be for the next four years. Even so, ACPE's mission is universal and our ability and capacity to deliver on that mission is vitally important to Alaska, now and in the future. I have had an opportunity to meet with Ms. Pat Pitney, the incoming Director of the Office of Management and Budget for high-level discussions about our programs, services and initiatives. It was helpful that Ms. Pitney is very familiar with the Commission's work from her time at the University of Alaska.

More details on current and upcoming activities are included in your Senior Managers' reports.

29th Alaska Legislature, First Regular Session

The First Regular Session of the 29th Alaska Legislature will convene January 20, 2015 and adjourn April 19, 2015. The first date on which prefiled bills will be released is January 9, 2015. A review and summary of legislation with any of potential interest to ACPE will be provided via email thereafter.

I look forward to discussing these and other topics of interest to the Commission. Please feel free to contact me in advance of the meeting if you have questions or comments about my report or any of the other materials provided in your packet.